



April 30, 2009

2009 legislative session in the books...sort of

Dear friends and neighbors,

The Legislature adjourned "Sine Die" (pronounced SIGN-ee DYE) last Sunday night, but unfortunately the majority party in the House didn't finish the bills they wanted in time and **now it looks as if the Legislature will have to come back for a special session next month.** Members, staff and families were crowding the Senate chamber in celebration of completing the 2009 session, when suddenly, just before the midnight deadline, everyone was asked to leave. It was an anticlimactic end to a session that saw so many disappointments for the people of Washington State. I'll go into more detail a little later, but first, here's a recap of the 2009 session:



I was sworn into office by Washington State Supreme Court Justice Gerry Alexander on January 12th. This is my second term as 28th District State Senator after serving five terms in the House of Representatives. **It's an honor and a privilege taking the oath of office, and again I thank you for choosing me to serve as your state senator once again.**

I began session by holding the first ever telephone town hall meeting in Pierce County. Using new technology, I was able to invite 20,000 people to participate in the live community forum. Participants asked me questions, listened to my answers and to each other, and were able to vote in real-time instant polls. My first telephone town hall was held in January, my second in April. It's a very convenient way for you to



get involved in your state government from the comfort of your own home, while at the same time it's very cost-effective for the state. **My thanks go out to all of you who were able to participate, and I look forward to conducting another telephone town hall in the near future.** I hope you'll be able to attend, and if you know someone in our district who doesn't receive these e-mail updates, ask them if they'd like to be included. It's the best way to know in advance when my next town hall meeting will be coming up.

My bills for 2009

I introduced a number of good bills this session, some of which were brand new and some which I've proposed in past sessions:

- [SB 5130](#) – Prisoner access to public records (PASSED)
- [SB 5525](#) – Limited rental vouchers (PASSED)
- [SB 5218](#) – SCC computer access (died in House Rules)
- [SB 5253](#) – Guilty but mentally ill
- [SB 5219](#) – High-risk homeless work group (died in House Rules)
- [SB 5217](#) – Art in state prisons
- [SJR 8208](#) – Conflicting residency requirement

Senate Bill 5130 was requested by the Attorney General and was intended to prevent frivolous or excessive public records requests by inmates in state prisons. I've never seen a bill move through the Legislature as quickly as this one did.



The governor signed my bill into law on March 20th, and almost immediately afterward I found out why. The state wanted to test the new law on a prisoner who is notorious for filing public records requests that waste time and money. The irony is that the inmate was seeking the excessive public records from my office on the very bill that prevent inmates from

seeking excessive public records! He has subsequently filed a defamation of character lawsuit against the Senate.

Senate Bill 5525 will provide limited rental vouchers for up to three months for individuals who have reached their date of release from state prison. In 2008, the Department of Corrections held about 800 offenders past their earned early release date due to a lack of available housing. At an average cost of about \$612 a week, the cost to taxpayers ends up being about \$15,000 per offender per year. My bill gives released offenders enough time to find employment, but not enough time to become dependent on the state, and could save the state up to \$5 million per biennium.

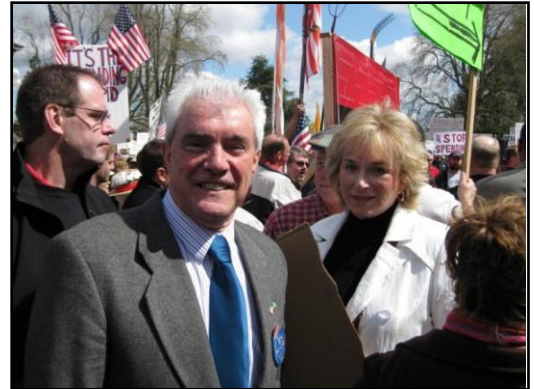
[House Bill 1517](#) passed this year as well. In its original form, the bill simply restored voting rights to released felons. In my opinion, that provides absolutely no incentive for offenders to pay their legal financial obligations to make their victims whole again. I amended the bill to make it more of a “trust but verify” system. With my language, the bill now says that if an offender misses three legal financial obligation payments in a one-year period, his or her voting rights can be terminated by a judge or court clerk until 24 consecutive months of future payments are made. The House of Representatives agreed, and the bill will be signed into law.

Rallies on the capitol campus



Also this session, I had the opportunity to participate in a number of rallies at the capitol. On January 20th, I spoke to a crowd gathered on the steps of the legislative building for the annual **March for Life**.

On April 15th, I attended one of the largest gatherings I've ever seen here in Olympia. It was the first **Taxpayer TEA (Taxed Enough Already) Party** and there were nearly 6,000 people in attendance. The message was loud and clear...the citizens of Washington are overtaxed and want the state and federal government to stop spending their money.



Other than legislative issues



There were also a few issues I worked on this session that weren't directly related to the Legislature. **To begin with, an underwater avalanche early in the year caused the power to go out on Anderson Island.** The power cable that runs from the Nisqually Delta to Anderson Island was damaged, so two giant generators were brought in to provide temporary power to

island residents. I worked with local, state and federal agencies worked together in the following months to find a solution to the problem. In the end, Tanner Electric was able to splice in a good piece of cable to repair the damaged segment, but determined that the entire cable will need replacing soon. The good news is that there was no loss of life or injuries as a result of the ordeal, and it was a great example of how different branches of government and private enterprise can cooperate.



Another issue I've been involved with is the construction of the new shelter for DuPont's Dynamite Train. Funded partially by last year's capital budget, the new shelter broke ground in March. Now, the canopy is complete and work to restore the train itself has begun. **After several weeks, the engine and whistle are now working and I've been helping to repair a lot of the**

internal parts in my spare time. Someday I hope to see the tracks lead back to the Puget Sound where the train delivered dynamite and explosives to the waiting ships for decades leading up to the 1990's.

State budget was topic number one

Clearly, the issue of prime importance this session was the state budget deficit. Some say the deficit was as large as \$9 billion, which is why the Legislature had such a tough time finding solutions to the problems we faced this session.

My priorities were to **take early action** to compound savings, **reform the way government operates** and make appropriate **cuts only if necessary**. Unfortunately, the final budget skipped the first two and went straight to making cuts. *Where were the priorities, and where does that leave the state in two years?*

If the Legislature had taken early action in December, we could have saved \$2.4 billion dollars of that deficit. **Instead, the majority party decided to wait until three days before session ended to release the final version of their budget.** They punted on issues like pension funding and paid family leave, and enacted a number of other poorly conceived and simply bad provisions as well:

- Education reform will cost \$3 -\$8 billion
- 10,000 higher education slots were cut and tuition was raised 14% per year

- A “back door” gas tax will raise prices 8 to 10 cents
- Consumers could see massive electrical cost increases
- Voter-approved performance audits were significantly reduced
- 40,000 people will be thrown off the Basic Health Plan

I believe that even in an economic recession, the state must **protect the most vulnerable** in our society. When the Legislature creates a budget, the **process must be transparent** and the **budget must be sustainable**. New budgets must be created using **NO NEW TAXES** and without asking the public for self-imposed taxes. The majority party chose not to follow these principles.

The priorities in this budget were wrong. Your child’s class size will increase, voter-approved performance audits will be cut and college, university and nursing home placements are eliminated. Yet the state is giving away \$400 million in free college tuition while at the same time illegal immigrants receive taxpayer-funded health care.

Perhaps the biggest concern I have with the operating budget is the cuts made to public safety. **I believe that public safety is the LAST place the Legislature should make cuts**, however under this budget:

- Low and moderate risk offenders will receive no supervision upon release
- Length of supervision time for serious violent offenders is reduced by a year, violent offenders by a year and a half
- Illegals could be deported before they serve any prison time
- Thieves can steal greater amounts

Instead, the majority party could have found savings in other places on which state residents are less dependent. Some of those ideas included:

- Bilingual education reform (\$40-\$60 M)

- Eliminate the life sciences discovery fund (\$40 M)
- Eliminate smoking cessation spending (\$36 M)
- No increase in state employee health benefits (\$98 M)
- Eliminate illegal immigrant health care (\$61 M)
- Eliminate all “learning improvement days” (\$37 M)
- Eliminate funding for “career” students (\$10 M)
- Reduce tuition waivers (\$39 M)
- Cut funding for the Arts Commission (\$4 M)

Because of the operating budget that passed the Legislature, our state will be fiscally even worse off two years from now. **The budget fails to make changes that will sustain us through a recession, many programs were “suspended” instead of cut, and budget holes were plugged with one-time stimulus money.** In 2011, the Legislature could face an even greater budget shortfall only without the \$5 billion in federal funds and state money transfers used to “balance” this budget.

The good news is that no facilities will close, such as the prison on McNeil Island, and cuts to personnel will be limited, especially to parole officers (CCOs).

In closing...

As a result of the grossly mismanaged 2009 legislative session, we’re expecting the governor to call us into a special session soon to take care of the House’s unfinished business. That’s a dangerous proposal, because even though the governor can ask that we only work on one issue, she can’t require it and it opens up Pandora’s Box for anyone with a dead bill or lingering issue to revive. There is a list of bills on our website that could find new life if we have to go to a special session, which incidentally would cost taxpayers about \$20,000 each day. Visit www.SenateRepublicans.wa.gov for details.

Feel free to forward this e-mail to anyone you think might be interested in receiving it.
Please ask them to contact me using the information below so I can add them to my distribution list.

I look forward to your comments and suggestions because they help me better represent you. My office phone number is (360) 786-7654, and my home phone number is (253) 581-2859. Or you can write me at **102 Irv Newhouse Building, P.O. Box 40428, Olympia, WA 98504-0428.**



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Sincerely,

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